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ABSTRACT

Recent work in language and text has explored such broad functional categories as evidentiality and affect, and has examined their cross-linguistic occurrences and manifestations. This paper focuses on a single construction, explores its variations, and describes and explains its pragmatic and textual functions. This rare construction, exemplified by "It is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer," occurs in several languages, denoting inferentiality, an aspect of evidentiality. (Contains 29 references.) (Author)

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INFERENTIALS: The Story of a Forgotten Evidential

Gerald P. Delahunty

Abstract: Recent work in language and text has explored such broad functional categories as evidentiality and affect, and has examined their cross-linguistic occurrences and manifestations. This paper focusses on a single construction, explores its variations, and describes and explains its pragmatic and textual functions. This rare construction, exemplified by It is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer, occurs in several languages, denoting inferentiality, an aspect of evidentiality.

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Introduction

This paper describes the grammatical, pragmatic, and textual properties of a sentence form which is both rare and rarely written about. The construction is illustrated by:

(1) It is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.

I have been sporadically collecting examples of this sentence type for several years, and in recent months, I have been watching for them in everything I read and listening for them in conversations and on the radio. In spite of this effort, I have as yet found less than 50 examples. In Jane Austen's six novels, I found only 7.

The rarity of the construction is matched by the rarity with which it is mentioned by linguists. I know of only two references to it, and in both the construction is mentioned merely as an appendix to the discussion of another sentence form. Delahunty (1982) mentions it as a type of cleft sentence; Quirk et al (1985) mention it in a footnote to their discussion of obligatory extrapositive constructions.

The form has no generally used name, and I have given it several over the last year or so, each

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reflecting a stage in my understanding of it. Most recently I have been calling it the Inferential. The reason for this name will, I trust, become clear as we proceed.

Before I begin discussing the sentence form itself, I would like to characterize, somewhat baldly and indelicately, how I see the field of linguistics from the point of view of someone interested in determining, describing, and explaining the properties of a particular construction.

Some linguists begin with what they take to be a discourse feature, for example, cohesion, evidentiality, focus, given/new information, theme, or topic, and and then explore its expression in texts (eg. Chafe 1986, Halliday and Hasan 1976; Prince 1979; Gundel 1988; Rochemont 1986). Others begin with marked sentence structures, such as topicalized sentences (Ward 1988), left dislocated sentences (Prince 1984), cleft sentences (Prince 1978), and then explore the discourse correlates or functions of the construction. They are generally satisfied with simply correlating form and function(s), and typically do not attempt to explain why a specific form functions as it does.

Some linguists rely primarily on their own intuitions and created data to inform them about the functions of the constructions they investigate (eg. Rochemont 1986); others base their analyses on data collected from texts or discourse -- so called "corpus studies" (eg. Kies 1988; Ward 1988; Prince 1978, 1984). These two approaches are probably not as distinct as they might seem, as even those who work from a corpus must rely on their intuitions to guide them in interpreting their data and generalizing from it. In fact, given that the roles sentences play in texts and their connections with their contexts are rarely stated overtly, analysts have no choice but to rely on their intuitions, which must then be characterized and accounted for.

A number of assumptions are shared by many if not all linguists. First, that their goal is to discover the general patterns of language structure and use (i.e. to "capture generalizations"); second, that textual structures are realized in sequences of sentences; and third, that language use is intentional and its interpretation involves inferring speakers' (the term includes writers) intentions.

The present study is, for the most part, a corpus study, though its purpose is to describe and explain intuitions regarding the interpretation of the inferential construction and the roles it plays in texts. I assume that communicated meaning has both conventional and non-conventional aspects. The conventional aspects are unpredictably and arbitrarily associated with expressions. The non-conventional aspects are meanings inferred from the conventional meanings, the fact that they have been uttered, Grice's (1967) Cooperative Principle and Maxims of Conversation, and in some cases their contexts.

I will begin by providing an overview of the inferential construction, its syntax and lexis. I will then explore its relationships to other sentence types, describing in particular how the construction can be modified by negation, modals, adverbs, and complementizers. Third, I will discuss five hypotheses regarding the construction's functions. Finally, I will relate the interpretation of inferentials to their semantics and particularly to their pragmatics.

Overview of the Inferential Construction

Characteristically, inferentials are sentences in which a tensed subordinate clause is embedded as the complement of a form of be whose subject is expletive it. I will refer to the embedded clause of an inferential, corresponding to that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer in (1), as "the clause," and the part to which the clause is subordinate as "the matrix," corresponding to it is in (1).

Expletive it subjects occur in a number of constructions, including meteorological, extrapositive, and cleft, respectively:

(2) It rained.
(3) It upsets me that we have had no snow.
(4) It was the hail that damaged my roof.

The inferential is particularly like the cleft construction as each has a matrix comprising expletive it and a form of be. Moreover, the cleft focus, underlined in (4) and (5), is frequently interpreted as contrastive, as is the clause of the inferential:

(5) It wasn't Jimmy that caused the S and L crisis; it was Ronny.

That the it subject of the inferential matrix is expletive, that is, non-referential and devoid of semantic import, is easily demonstrated. It cannot be questioned:

(6) *What is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer?

Nor can it be replaced by any other pronoun:

(7) *That/this is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.

In languages such as Italian and Spanish (so-called "Pro-drop" languages), which, as we will see below, also have inferential constructions, the expletive subject must be empty.

The other obligatory component of the matrix is a form of be, which normally links pairs of entities or entities and qualities:

(8) Edgar is the chef.
(9) Edgar is in the kitchen.
(10) Edgar is very clever.

In each of these examples both the subject and the complement of be are meaningful and referential. We can, for example, sensibly question either:

(11) Who is the chef?
(12) Where is Edgar?

In the inferential, however, the copula links a clause with a meaningless, non-referential subject, so its semantics is obscure at best. Moreover, in a language like Hungarian, which also has an inferential construction, both the expletive subject and the copula are omitted. It seems reasonable to conclude that both it and be of the matrix are semantically (and as we will see, truth conditionally) null.

Modifications/Elaborations/Relations

The inferential construction interacts with various grammatical systems of the language. The most

particularly relevant elaboration in this context is the set of ways in which the degree of certitude with which an assertion is made can be expressed. The first method of indicating this is by including modals (only may, could, and might occur in my corpus) in the matrix clauses:

(13)a. It is that he lacks some forms of imagination.
b. It must/may/etc. be that he lacks some forms of imagination.

A second system that English uses to modify the degree of confidence associated with a sentence is embedding it as the complement of sets of verbs, adjectives, and nouns, which often occur as the complements of be and which may be associated with an expletive it subject. From the perspective of these two possibilities, the matrix copula of an inferential may be viewed as being in paradigmatic contrast with verbs such as seem and appear:

(14)a. It is that I'm not pretty enough.
b. It seems/appears that I'm not pretty enough.
(15) It is obvious/clear/etc. that I'm not pretty enough.
(16) It is a fact/the truth/a possibility/etc. that I'm not pretty enough.

If we see inferentials as in paradigmatic contrast with constructions such as these, we might reasonably assume that the clause is the complement of a zero head. In which case, (14a) would be analysed as:

(17) It is [e] that I'm not pretty enough.

The entire inferential structure may be (and in actual use, very often is) modified by adverbs such as perhaps:

(18) Perhaps, it is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer. (Gogarty 1968:59)

It is also modifiable by the addition of adverbs within the matrix:

(19)a. It was only that the Celts had retained archaic practices once also at home in Italy. (Powell 1983:180)

b. It was just that it was raining. (Irving 1973:213-4)
c. It was simply that he had no interest in a girl child. (Bradley 1982:108)

These adverbs occur in the position in which such adverbs appear in non-inferential sentences:

(20) John has just left.

The set of possible complementizers provides yet another device for indicating modality. The complementiser that is optional:

(21) "Oh, it's I'm not pretty enough." (Donohue transcript no. 03120, cited in Kies 1988)

The complementizers as if and as though are very common alternatives to that. Clearly, (22a) represents a stronger claim than (22b):

(22)a. It was that neither had heard him.
b. It was as if neither had heard him. (Ludlum 1983:233)

As if/as though generally indicate counterfactuality, and I will not attempt to deal with sentences of that sort in this paper, although they occur more frequently than their inferential relatives.

The final modification I wish to mention here is negation. The negative particle not may be inserted into the matrix in the position it would have in any clause, after the tense-indicating verb:

(23) It is not that one fears treachery. (Murdoch 1975:43)

Or after the modal:

(24) It couldn't be he'd be goin' in it agin. (Somerville and Ross 1977:264)

Modals and negation in inferentials may occur in either or both the matrix and the subordinate clause, a possibility not available in simple sentences:

(25)a. It may be that I will have tasks for you as cruel as those the Great Mother has laid on me. (Bradley 1982:136)

b. *I may will have tasks for you as cruel as those the Great Mother has laid on me.

(26)a. It is not that the model is not wrong.
b. ?The model is not not wrong.

Of my 49 examples, 16 are positive and unmodalized (2 of these are questions); 6 are positive and modalized; and 27 are negative. Five of my examples are modified by external adverbs: two each by perhaps and if, and one by thus. Twelve examples are internally modified by adverbs: five by only, four by just, two by simply, and one by (not) so much. We find the same range of modifiers associated with the focus of a cleft sentence:

(27)a. It was just/only to Bill that we spoke.
b. Perhaps, it was simply because they were too hungry to cook that they ate out.

We can summarize this discussion characterizing the inferential as a copular matrix with expletive subject and tensed complement clause, which may be modified by the addition of modals, negation or adverbs. We can represent it as the following formula:

(28) (ADV) it (MOD) (NEG) be (ADVP) (COMP) S

As predicted by the present analysis, this construction is not idiosyncratic to English. Analogous constructions exist in other languages with the same interpretations as their English counterparts. The German, French, Italian, Spanish, and Hungarian translations of (29) are well-formed, structurally analogous to the English, and appropriate to the context.[1]

(29) But behind the smile is a "We vs. Them" attitude that has set the whole tone for his Administration's relations with the press. It's not that he hates the press the way Nixon did, it's just that he is insensitive to the press' role in our society and sees the media generally as something to be manipulated, but not trusted. (L.A. Times 12/18/83)

German:

(30) Es ist nicht, dass er die Presse hasst, wie Nixon es tat. Es ist nur, dass er nicht feinfühlig gegenüber der Rolle der Presse

in unserer Gesellschaft und dass er die Medien generell als etwas sieht, das manipuliert werden muss und dem man nicht trauen kann.

French:

(31) Ce n'est pas qu'il deteste la presse comme Nixon, c'est seulement qu'il est insensible au rôle de la presse dans notre société et considère en général les medias quelquechose à manipuler mais pas quelquechose à quoi se fier.

Spanish:

(32) No es que odie la prensa como Nixon, es que insensible a la función de la prensa en nuestra sociedad y, por lo general, ve el medio como algo para ser manipulado pero no digno de la confranza. (NB. No overt subject in matrix.)

Italian:

(33) Non é che lui odi la stampa come Nixon, é solo che é insensibile al ruolo della stampa nella nostra societá, e in generale considera i mezzi di comunicazione como qualcosa da manipolare non qualcosa su cui contare. (NB. Again no overt subject in matrix.)

Hungarian:

(34) Nem mintha gyülölné a sajtót ahogy Nixon tette, csak éppen érzéketlen a sajtó társadalmi szerepe iránt, általában úgy tekinti a hírközlést mint valamit amit manipulálni lehet, de megbízni benne nem. (NB. The matrix contains neither a subject nor a copula, but the clause is subordinate in form.)

It may seem methodologically odd to base the claim that this construction exists in other languages on translations of an English example. However, the well-formedness of the construction and its surrounding text, and their contextualized meanings have been checked with native speakers of the languages in question. This is simply a benign modification of

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field linguists' practice. Lest any discomfort remain, the following example is from a naturally occurring conversation in Italian:

(35) (E cracks her knuckles; D looks unhappy)
E. Non ti piace? (Not you please?)
Does this upset you?
D. Non e che non mi piace,
(Not is that not me please,)
ma ti fai male.
(but you does bad)
It is not that it bothers me,
but it is bad for you.

Functions/Uses

In this section I consider a number of hypotheses regarding the functions of the inferential. Two of the functions that I consider are derived from earlier work; the remainder are derived from the corpus.

Structural: The first hypothesis is that the construction is merely a structural device with which no meaning is associated other than that of the clause. As a device it allows modals, negation, and adverbs to be positioned so that the entire clause is within their scope. It also allows the omission of redundant matrix modals, etc. in a text in which a series of clauses are coordinated, as in:

(36) It might be that the heat capacity of the oceans is larger than current models calculate, that the sun's output has declined slightly or that volcanoes have injected more dust into the stratosphere than is currently known, thereby reducing the solar energy reaching the ground. (Schneider 1989)

The matrix It might be is followed by three coordinated clauses, each of which is in the scope of the modal might, which appears only once in the sentence. If the information in the clauses were expressed in a form other than the inferential, the modal would have to be repeated in each clause. The inferential structure thus allows an elegant and parsimonious parallelism.

In the following example the inferential matrix provides the sole position in which only can modify the

clause and carry the intended contrast with extraordinary:

(37) Caesar understood well the propitiatory nature of sacrifice amongst the Gauls, but of course there was nothing extraordinary in this custom in Gaul, or in the wider Celtic domain; it was only that the Celts had retained archaic practices once also at home in Italy, as in Greece, but now long outmoded. (Powell 1983:180)

However, consideration of the contexts in which the above examples occur suggests that structural elegance and parsimony are not the sole purposes in choosing this construction. The inferential in (37) indicates not just that there was nothing extraordinary about this custom in Gaul, but also why.

Possibility and Reflection: Quirk et al, in the footnote in which they refer to the construction, suggest that it is related to obligatory extrapositive sentences like:

(38) It seems that everything is fine. (Quirk et al 1985:1392)

and that it may be 'used for expressions of possibility and (especially) for reflective questions.' However, Quirk and his colleagues stack their deck. Their examples are:

(39)a. It may be that she no longer trusts you.
b. Could it be that you left the keys in your office? (Quirk et al 1985:1392)

The second example is a question, and in both examples the matrix contains a modal. The double underlined inferential in (40) is one of my two interrogative examples, both of which can regarded as reflective questions, although that is not all that can relevantly be claimed about them:

(40) She has us all in her hand. How can she have such power over us all? Or is it that she is the only mother Morgause has ever known? She was a grown woman when Morgause was born, she has always been mother, as well as sister, to both of us. Their mother, who had been too old for childbearing, had died giving birth to

Morgause. (Bradley 1982:10-11. Emphasis in original.)

However, the two inferentials in my corpus which are positive, non-interrogative, unmodalized, and unmodified by adverbs do not indicate possibility:

(41) A problem like this gentleman talked about so openly might be just a normal pattern for him, and that couple would feel better if that woman knew it was his normal pattern, she might find it much easier to accept than if she thought, 'Oh, it's I'm not pretty enough.' (Donohue transcript no. 03120)

(42) Caesar is a tyrant - both as husband and as ruler. It is not that, like other tyrants, he is chary of according liberty to others; it is that, loftily free himself, he has lost all touch with the way freedom operates and is developed in others; always mistaken, he accords too little or he accords too much. (Wilder 1987:194)

Even the following, which contains an adverb, simply asserts that Uther Pendragon had no particular interest in a girl child:

(43) Not that Uther was ever unkind to me; it was simply that he had no particular interest in a girl child. (Bradley 1982:108)

This suggests that the form itself may not express possibility; rather, Quirk et al's choosing modalized forms misled them.

Nonetheless, the form is quite compatible with the expression of possibility, as the modalized forms I have collected show:

(44) It may be that you have received report of her death from other sources. It may also be true - and we pray that it will be so - that by the time this letter is safe in your hands, her servants will have been set free. (Garrett 1983:140)

And reflection, even in declaratives:

(45) Is she on a par with your mother and mine and with my aunt? - I do not know. It may be that her virtues have that inflexibility that mars those of her husband and her father, joyless men. (Wilder 1987:212)

As I noted earlier, an inferential may be modified by an adverb such as perhaps, thus providing another means of indicating possibility or reflection:

(46) He had got past the stage of reason, even his power of mocking at himself was dead, or perhaps it was that there seemed no longer anything that could be mocked at. (Somerville and Ross 1977:209/10)

(47) 'He groans when a really good-looking girl meets him. The prettier the worse it takes him. Sometimes he's damned rude.'
'Perhaps it is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer?' (Gogarty 1968:58-9)

These examples suggest that possibility is indicated by a modal or an adverb, not by the inferential form itself. I conclude that the possibility/reflection hypothesis is both too strong and too weak. Not all inferentials are used to indicate possibility or reflection, and many require richer interpretations. For example, the following (modalized) inferential indicates the cause of, or explanation for, Caesar's excesses:

(48) Caesar shrinks from no responsibility. He heaps more and more upon his shoulders.
"It may be that he lacks some forms of imagination." (Wilder 1987:174)

Explanations/Accounts: The next hypothesis I consider is that the information in the clause of an inferential is offered as an explanation for whatever circumstances are under discussion. This interpretation occurs amongst all three types, positive unmodalized, modalized, and negative inferentials.

The inferential in (46) is a tentative reformulation or reinterpretation of the information presented immediately before it, but it also seems to provide an explanation for the character's current state of mind. (49) is a tentatively proposed

explanation for 'why European women are utterly without interest for' the author's friend:

(49) Perhaps, it is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer?'

(50) is an explanation for the couple's sexual difficulties:

(50) 'Oh, it's I'm not pretty enough.'

The underlined negative inferential in (51) rejects I did not think of it as an explanation for Wentworth's not writing to Anne Elliot:

(51) 'Tell me if, when I returned to England in the year eight, with a few thousand pounds, and was posted into the Laconia, if I had then written to you, would you have answered my letter? would you in short, have renewed the engagement then?'
'Would I!' was all her answer; but the accent was decisive enough.
'Good God!' he cried, 'you would! It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what would alone crown my other success. But I was proud, too proud to ask again.' (Austen 1980:233)

However, not all inferentials have a clear explanatory function, as those that follow demonstrate. The first reflects a constraint on narrators:

(52) You are to understand, Father, that though she was buried meanly and with heretical ceremony, that though she was not allowed to have the service of a priest of her faith at the time of her death, she died as much in the faith and for the faith as any of our martyrs here.
It may be that you have received report of her death from other sources. It may also be true - and we pray that it will be so - that by the time this letter is safe in your hands, her servants will have been set free. (Garrett 1983:140)

This passage occurs in the novel in a letter in which the writer reports the death and interment of Mary, Queen of Scots. It reflects the constraint that those who purport to be purveying news must not tell what is

already known to the addressee. The clause does not represent the reason for the letter; that comes later. Rather, it suggests that the writer is aware that his addressee may wonder why the letter is being written at all. By employing the inferential, the writer adverts to an assumption that he thinks may be made by the letter's reader.

Another example inconsistent with the account hypothesis is:

(53) Perhaps, then, it is not that what is denied must first have been asserted, or that positive facts are more real or more basic than negative ones, but simply that knowledge of a positive fact counts for more than knowledge of a negative one. (Horn 1989:47)

in which a hypothesis discussed earlier in the text is rejected.

These two examples function in ways typical of the majority of the negative inferentials in my corpus, all but two of which can be interpreted as rejections of propositions which are known to, or inferrable by, the audiences to whom the discourse is addressed. The two which are not compatible with this interpretation are counterfactuals in the scope of <u>if</u>, illustrated by:

(54) <u>If it wasn't that I'm afraid you might be tired after your walk</u>, I'd ask you to help me with a very painful bit of work that I was just at when you came. (Somerville and Ross 1977:230)

The majority, however, are similar to:

(55) Nobody doubts her right to have precedence of mamma, but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it. <u>It is not that mamma cares about it least in the world</u>, but I know it is taken notice of by many persons.' (Austen 1980:47)

In this example, one of the Miss Musgroves denies an inference which might be made by her audience, Anne Elliot, about why she wishes Anne's sister, Mary, not to insist upon the prerogatives due to her rank. That inference is, of course, that the elder Mrs. Musgrove is unhappy at her daughter-in-law's higher rank.

Contrast: Delahunty (1982) claims that the inferential construction is a type of cleft and that its clause corresponds to a cleft focus. Given that cleft foci are often contrastively interpreted, we should not be surprised to find that inferentials often express a contrast between the information in the clause and information in the context.

I begin with positive, unmodalized inferentials. Many follow a context in which a negative assertion is made and their function seems to be to propose the substitution of the information in the clause for the rejected assertion. This pattern is particularly clear in cases where a negated inferential precedes a positive one, in an elegant parallel structure which we might call "tandem inferentials." (29) above is one such; (56) is another:

(56) It is not that, like other tyrants, he is chary of according liberty to others; it is that, loftily free himself, he has lost all touch with the way freedom operates and is developed in others; always mistaken, he accords too little or he accords too much. (Wilder 1987:194)

Not all positive inferentials occur in tandem constructions; but a negative occurs prior to many:

(57) He had not been cruel to her, or if he was, it was only that he seemed to know little of women's bodies and how to use them. (Bradley 1982:24)

(58) Not that Uther was ever unkind to me; it was simply that he had no particular interest in a girl child. (Bradley 1982:108)

This pattern suggests that the form indicates a contrast between the truth of the inferential clause and the truth of some other assumption locally relevant in the discourse. The contrastive interpretation of the construction is in keeping with the contrastive function often associated with cleft sentences, thus supporting the claim in Delahunty (1982) that the two constructions are related. However, just as it is not the case that every cleft focus is contrastive, not every inferential requires or admits a contrastive interpretation. (57) seems not to be contrastive

(although it could be so interpreted if it were not in the scope of the conditional or if he was).

Negative Inferentials: Because they do not entirely parallel their positive counterparts, negative inferentials (that is, inferential constructions with a negated matrix) require a brief separate comment. We should expect negative inferentials simply to deny the inferences licensed by their positives, and for the most part this is how they function. Clearly, negative inferentials reject the truth of the information in the clause:

(59) "Nance was sayin' Lambert was gone to Dublin again, but what signifies what the likes of her'd say; it couldn't be he'd be goin' in it agin and he not home a week from it." (Somerville and Ross 1977:264)

However, they may reject, not the truth, but the relevance of an assertion or an assumption at the point in the discourse at which they occur:

(60) On principle I usually avoid introducing my friends and acquaintances to each other. It is not that one fears treachery, though of course one does. What human fear is deeper? But endless little unnecessary troubles usually result from such introductions. (Murdoch 1975:43)

That this discourse is not contradictory follows from the fact that matrix negation does not entail the negated non-inferential. Similarly, the negative inferential in (61) is compatible with either the model being right or being wrong. Its function is to forestall the reader's assumption that the author's litany of the model's inadequacies leads to the conclusion that it is wrong:

(61) Lichardus' model is a variant of a broader explanation of the cultural change seen throughout both Northern and Central Europe in the Late Neolithic. . . [Paragraph continues detailing problems with Lichardus' model.] It is not that the model is wrong; there is just not enough evidence proposed to evaluate it. (Mallory 1989:253)

They may also deny an inference which would provide a plausible explanation relevant in the context:

(62) It is a recurrent joke among writers of farces that wives rejoice in being beaten by their husbands. It reflects, however, an eternal truth - that there is a great comfort in knowing that those who love you love you enough to take the responsibility for marking out the permissible. Husbands often err - but in both directions. Caesar is a tyrant - both as husband and as ruler. It is not that, like other tyrants, he is chary of according liberty to others; it is that, loftily free himself, he has lost all touch with the way freedom operates and is developed in others; always mistaken, he accords too little or he accords too much. (Wilder 1987:194)

The first, negative, inferential rejects as an explanation of Caesar's tyranny that he is chary of according liberty to others, a perfectly plausible explanation for his behaviour as a ruler and as a husband, and an inference that might be made by any reasonable audience. The second, positive, inferential proposes that the correct explanation, the relevant inference, is that Caesar, loftily free himself, has lost all touch with the way freedom operates in others.

A negative inferential may also deny a plausible interpretation or extrapolation from its context, in the following case, the reasonable extrapolation that demon lovers are usually grossly cruel:

(63) It was as if I had known Christian as a real woman in some previous incarnation, and were now reliving, perhaps as a punishment, some doomed perverted spiritual pattern. (I suspect there are many such couples.) Or as if she had died long before and come back to me as a demon lover. Demon lovers are always relentless, however kind in life. And it was sometimes as if I could 'remember' Christian's kindness, though all now was spite and demonry. It was not that she was usually, though she was sometimes, grossly cruel. (Murdoch 1975:91-2)

They may also deny a commonsense assumption, such as that spies fear being discovered:

(64) Will not pause there if he can help it. "For the simple reason," he abruptly allows, "that in another place and at another time I knew them both." . . . "It is not that I would fear discovery," says he interrupting. "I have never done any serious disservice to either one - at least nothing they would be likely to know of. And even if they should have cause to mistrust me, I am Sir William Cecil's man, and he has been a patron to them both. But - you should understand this well enough and without knowing too much - there would be questions. There would be, if only for the sake of friendship and good manners, a delay I cannot afford. (Garrett 1983:173)

Only one of my collection of negative inferentials contains a modal, (59) above. Clearly the negative takes scope over the modal and we can paraphrase it as:

(65) It is not possible that he'd be goin' in it agin (sic).

We are justified in interpreting this as the negation of a possibility.

Many of the inferentials in the corpus, both positive and negative, contain matrix adverbs, typically only, just, or simply, adverbs that also modify the focus of clefts. One function of clefts is to indicate that the focus exhaustively lists the elements of which the clause is true (Horn 1981). Exhaustive listing seems closely related to contrast, which denies the truth or relevance of one proposition and asserts the truth or relevance of another. In clefts these adverbs strengthen the suggestion of exhaustiveness, thus strengthening the contrast; in inferentials, they seem to weaken the contrast by limiting its domain. In the following example, the contrast between Darcy and "we all" is initially proposed to be that he likes his own way, but is subsequently downgraded to his merely being richer than the others, and so better able to afford to indulge himself:

(66) I do not know any body who seems more to enjoy the power of doing what he likes than Mr. Darcy.'
'He likes to have his own way very well,' replied Colonel Fitzwilliam. 'But so we all do. It is only that he has better means of having it than many others, because he is rich, and many others are poor.' (Austen 1963:153/4)

Similarly, the following passage denies that medieval Irish history was more complex than that of other comparable societies; the inferential limits the contrast to the fact that the Irish situation is simply not as poorly documented:

(67) There is certainly no reason to assume that the history of Ireland at this time was any more complex than the history of other peoples at a comparable stage of development; it is only that in the case of most other peoples it is even less well-documented. (Richter 1988:32)

In examples which contain matrix adverbs and negation, the adverb falls within the scope of the negative. When the adverb is only, the exhaustiveness of the inference is denied. The following passage asserts that Anne Elliot could never accept Mr. Elliot both because her feelings were adverse to him and her judgment was against him:

(68) She never could accept him. And it was not only that her feelings were still adverse to any man save one; her judgement, on a serious consideration of the possibilities of such a case, was against Mr. Elliot. (Austen 1980:152)

When the adverb is just or simply, the denial may be either of exhaustiveness or of a limitation of the domain of contrast:

(69) 'I wish, I wish she hadn't met Arnold.'
'You're very attached to Arnold, aren't you?'
'Yes.'
'It's not just that you care what he thinks?'
'No.' (Murdoch 1975:117)

(70) It is not simply that I have forgotten the long trail of my own accomodations. Our common enemy is that Lockean heritage: (Perry 1981)

So, there is a general, though not perfect parallelism between positive and negative inferentials. The negative denies the various inferences licensed by the positive. Typically, negative inferentials occur in the context of a contrasting claim, most clearly exemplified in the tandem constructions. We can reasonably interpret the pattern as: "The inference to draw from this information is not thus and so; rather it is such and such."

Many negated inferentials raise the issue of where an inference rejected by a negative inferential comes from. The rejected proposition is often left unexpressed, giving the impression that the speaker has reached a point in the discourse where s/he figures that the audience might be entertaining the assumption expressed in the clause, and that it should be scotched as expeditiously as possible.

Inferences and Inferentials

Our search for an adequate account of the functions of the inferential construction has so far led us to examine four hypotheses: that the form is an interpretationally neutral structural device for positioning operators whose scope is the entire clause; that it suggests possibility or reflection; that it proposes explanations; and that its clause contrasts with some other locally relevant proposition. Clearly, while each hypothesis accounts for some examples in the corpus, none accounts for them all, and so we need a more general hypothesis.

The final hypothesis is that the form can be viewed as a pragmatic instruction to its audience to infer a relationship between the construction and its context that goes beyond the mere addition of the information conventionally denoted by the clause (hence the label "inferential"). This assumption is quite consistent with all but the first of the earlier hypotheses, as each can be viewed as a specific way in which the information in the clause is related to its context. Consider the following pair:

(71)a. Women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.
b. It is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.

(71a) merely reports that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer; (71b) on the other hand, invites the inference that a richer interpretation is warranted. The author and autobiographer, Oliver Gogarty, is discussing his friend McLoren's sexual difficulties with one of his 'informants.' McLoren as a young man stationed with the British army in India apparently had sexual relations with a sacred temple courtesan ('a form of prayer'), which were of such intensity and duration that 'European women are utterly without interest' for him. We are invited by the inferential to conclude that Gogarty views the fact that Irish women are not a form of prayer as the reason for McLoren's sexual difficulties. The relevant context is given in:

(72) 'He groans when a really good-looking girl meets him. The prettier the worse it takes him. Sometimes he's damned rude.'
'Perhaps it is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer?' Let it not be thought that I was heartless or that I did not do my best for McLoren. At the risk of being misunderstood, I wrote to India to a Diotima whom I knew, to a lady who 'had intelligence in love', asking what might be done. (Gogarty 1968:58-9)

The adverb perhaps and the question mark are consistent with this view as they indicate that the inference is tentative. The remarks which follow the inferential make clear the diagnostic interpretation of its clause.

If we assume that audiences create meanings by drawing inferences, and if we also assume that a speaker's goal is to ensure that the audience draws only the inferences he or she intends, then we can view the inferential form as having two closely related uses. First, its positive form functions as an instruction to the audience to infer richer connections between the information communicated by its clause and its context than would be licensed if the clause occurred unembedded. Second, the negative inferential indicates that an inference which may be plausible in the context is not intended by the narrator. The adverbs and modals which occur in many inferentials

indicate the degree of faith the speaker has in the inference. This analysis is compatible with, but broader than, the possibility/reflection, contrast, and explanation hypotheses.

Meaning

Linguistic meaning may be divided into conventional and non-conventional aspects. The conventional, arbitrary, unpredictable aspects of meaning associated with linguistic forms are frequently conceptualised in terms of entailments and conventional implicatures. Conventional implicatures are features of the meaning of an expression which are not entailed, but which are nonetheless arbitrary and unpredictable. Like entailments, they cannot be worked out and so must be learned as the core meanings of words are learned. Typical cases of conventional implicature are associated with words such as even, manage, but:

(73)a. Even Fred managed to get to the head of the Amazon.
b. He eats it, but he doesn't like it.

Even suggests that Fred is the least likely person to manage to get to the head of the Amazon. Manage suggests that the task was not easy; but suggests something like in spite of or contrary to expectation. These suggestions are not logical implications of the meanings of the words, although they are represented in dictionaries.

Looked at from this point of view, the conventional meaning of (74a) is indistinguishable from that of (74b):

(74)a. It is that it was raining.
b. It was raining.

Suffice it to say that if one is true, the other must also be true. The important issue for now is, if the positive inferential construction and its non-inferential counterpart have the same conventional meanings, how and why do speakers distinguish between the forms?

While the positive forms are conventionally synonymous, the negative and modalized forms are not. More specifically, an inferential with negation or a

modal in the matrix is not synonymous with a negated non-inferential or one with the same modal. Consider:

(75)a. It is not that one fears treachery, though of course one does. (Murdoch 1975:43)

b. ?One does not fear treachery, though of course one does.

The first of these is a consistent piece of text; the second is contradictory. Clearly the effects of negation in the matrix of an inferential differ from its effects in a non-inferential construction.

There is a palpable, though subtle difference in interpretation between a matrix modalized inferential and a corresponding non-inferential with the same modal, as the following show:

(76)a. Caesar shrinks from no responsibility. He heaps more and more upon his shoulders.
"It may be that he lacks some forms of imagination. It is very certain that he gives little thought to the past and does not attempt to envisage the future clearly. He does not cultivate remorse and does not indulge in aspiration." (Wilder 1987:174)

b. Caesar shrinks from no responsibility. He heaps more and more upon his shoulders.
"He may lack some forms of imagination."

The modalized inferential in the first (and actual) version explains why Caesar shrinks from no responsibility. The modalized non-inferential in the second (modified) version can be interpreted as suggesting that the speaker is merely adding to the previous assertions, though with no great confidence, the assertion that Caesar lacks certain forms of imagination.

Pragmatics

Linguistic communication involves both decoding conventional symbols and inferring significance from the choice of words and syntactic structures, as well

as from the textual and situational contexts in which they occur. I will assume that the non-conventional component can be represented by Grice's Cooperative Principle and Maxims of Conversation. These apply to all kinds of linguistic communication, spoken or written. They are also assumed to be universal, which partially accounts for the fact that analogous forms occur, even in languages unrelated to English.

On the non-conventional side of the linguistic ledger are the two types of conversational implicature: particularized conversational implicatures limited to, and dependent upon, particular contexts, and generalized conversational implicatures, which are associated with the utterance of an expression unless contradicted by the context.

Characteristically, conversational implicatures can be calculated using the literal meaning of an expression, the CP and Maxims, and in the case of particularized implicatures, the context.

What I wish to claim is that the special status of the clause of an inferential is a generalized conversational implicature, and thus calculable. The calculation might go as follows:

A speaker or writer has used an inferential such as (1) which means, conventionally speaking, the same as the corresponding non-inferential (77).

(1) It is that women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.
(77) Women in Ireland are not a form of prayer.

So, given a choice between (1) and (77), why would a speaker choose the expression that includes the semantically empty <u>it</u> and <u>be</u>?

(1) cannot mean just (77) because this would violate the maxim of manner, specifically the injunction to be brief. It would also violate the maxim of relation, as <u>it</u> and <u>be</u> would have no relevance.

Nor can (1) convey less than (77) because (77) represents the conventional meaning of (1), the minimal information represented by both. If (1) meant less than (77), a hearer could not work out the significance of (1) as <u>it</u> and <u>be</u>, having no conventional meaning, give hearers no clue as to what information in (77) to disregard. Consequently, a speaker using (1) to convey

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less information than (77) would be in violation of the maxim of manner's injunction against obscurity.

It follows that (1) must have more significance than (77). This extra significance cannot be conventional because if it were the speaker would be being obscure and so in violation of manner, and perhaps also in violation of quantity in not supplying sufficient information for the circumstances, as we are given no clues as to what that conventional extra might be.

Consequently, the extra significance associated with (1) must have to do with the status of the information represented in it. We can view this special status from the point of view of the maxim of quality. If the speaker had used (77) he would merely have made a claim which he believed to be true and warranted by sufficient evidence. That is, the source of the evaluation of the claim as true or false and the knowledge and interpretation of the evidence upon which this evaluation is based are located in the speaker. The warrant for their truth is the fact of their utterance and the maxim of quality.

What inferentials do is locate the warrant for the truth or falsity of the claim outside of the speaker. The particular warrants for the truth or falsity of the claim are matters for interpretation in the local context. The construction indicates that the clause is taken to be inferred or inferrable, and the context determines the particular grounds for inferring the clause. Technically, the special status of the clause as inferred or inferrable is a generalized conversational implicature, and its local interpretation as an account, possibility, or reflection is a particularized implicature, dependent upon the specific local context.

Conclusion

Given that a speaker must guide an audience along a narrow interpretational path, licensing certain inferences and preempting others, it should not be surprising that languages provide sentence structures which indicate that information is inferred. Nor should it be surprising to find that these forms occur in identifiable patterns designed specifically to

indicate that the narrator wishes the audience to draw, not this inference, but that other one.

Chafe (1986:271) use the term "evidentiality" 'to cover any linguistic expression of attitudes toward knowledge.' He does not include the construction that I have been calling the "inferential" among evidentials. There can be no doubt, however, that the construction expresses an attitude toward knowledge and should therefore be classed as an evidential.

NOTES

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